

Stewardship Notes

Indiana Division of Forestry



Safety in the Woods

There are many things that may need to be done in the woods that can require the use of machinery or chemicals. Either of these tools can present a hazard to the user if proper precautions are not used. Cutting firewood for home use, for example, is considered by many people to be a relaxing activity even though it is necessary work. An accident with a chainsaw or axe, however, can drastically alter this lifestyle. Becoming acquainted with simple safety measures ahead of time may prevent an accident from becoming a major tragedy.

A chainsaw is one of the most useful tools a landowner can use to accomplish many activities in woodland management. But, like any tool, it must be used properly for best results and for the highest degree of safety. After purchasing a chainsaw, be sure you are thoroughly familiar with its operation and maintenance. Check with your dealer for training if necessary.

Some simple safety gear should be worn every time you operate your saw. Chaps or chainsaw pants are specially made with materials that will clog and stop the chain on your saw should it come into contact with your leg. This is a very inexpensive investment in comparison to a trip to the emergency room! Other equipment should include a hardhat to prevent head injuries, a face screen (attached to the hat) or goggles to prevent eye injuries, and hearing protection. Leather gloves will help ward off blisters and splinters, and sturdy leather boots will give solid footing while protecting your feet and ankles. Loose clothing should be avoided, but bright colors are very helpful for visibility in the woods. Along with the necessary wrenches, gas and oil cans, etc., one more tool should always be handy: a well-stocked first aid kit. There are kits manufactured specifically to be worn on the belt while using a saw, and there should also be one in each vehicle driven to the woods.

Keeping your tools sharp and in top shape can also help prevent accidents.

Common sense says that you should never work alone in the woods. However, it may sometimes be necessary. If so, always leave word with someone where you are, what you're doing, and what time you expect to return.

When using any type of chemicals, be sure to read and follow the label directions. Most chemicals used in forestry applications are relatively safe, but any misuse can result in injury. Rubber gloves and eye protection should be worn at all times when handling any chemicals. Washing your hands before eating and using the restroom is a good rule to follow. If your clothing becomes contaminated with chemicals, wash them separately from your regular laundry.

Following a few simple safety steps prior to and during your woods work will reduce the risk of injury to yourself and others, and will increase your satisfaction with the work you have accomplished.

